

Supervisor Romaine Presents his 2017 State of the Town Address "Building on Strength, Protecting Our Future, Moving Brookhaven Forward"

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Farmingville, NY – On March 23, Supervisor Ed Romaine delivered his fifth State of the Town address in the auditorium at Brookhaven Town Hall. The theme of the address was "Building on Strength, Protecting Our Future, Moving Brookhaven Forward" and he delivered an optimistic look at the great strides that have been made this past year, his new initiatives and the challenges that face the Town in the years ahead. Declaring that the "state of the Town is good and getting better," the Supervisor opened his address by acknowledging the efforts of the Town Board and the Commissioners, Department heads and employees who serve the residents of the Town of Brookhaven.

Highlights of Supervisor Romaine's State of the Town Address include:

Finances

The Supervisor noted that Brookhaven is financially strong and has maintained its AAA bond rating, the highest that can be attained. The Town has also experienced a surplus for the third consecutive year (approximately \$4.5 million in the Town-wide funds and \$2 million in the part-Town funds). This strong performance was primarily due to:

- Higher revenue from increased home sales and mortgage tax receipts;
- Increased franchise agreements, landfill, planning, building and zoning revenues;
- Well managed employee compensation and benefits that have saved almost \$3.5 million;
- Part Town Highway Fund ending fiscal year 2016 with an estimated surplus of \$500,000;
- Pipeline Debt Reduction has contributed to a \$5 million increase in debt reserves; and
- All major operating funds completed 2016 with better than planned financial performance.

Supervisor Romaine thanked the members of the Town Board and commended their efforts to keep expenses down and save taxpayer dollars. He also noted that since taking office, his budgets have complied with the Town's spending, debt and tax rate caps and assured taxpayers that they will continue to receive their rebate check from the State of New York.

Consolidation

Declaring that the Town can "work smarter" to save taxpayer dollars, Supervisor Romaine outlined his plan to explore new initiatives with local municipalities and special districts to consolidate services. His efforts have been recognized by New York State, resulting in a \$50,000 award for Phase I of the Municipal Consolidation and Efficiency Grant to develop a plan to reduce property taxes. If the plan is accepted, the Town will be eligible to receive a \$20 million grant to see it through.

Utility Rates and Storm Preparedness Voicing concerns about rising utility rates on Long Island, the Supervisor said he will continue to monitor LIPA/PSEG and National Grid billing formats, their rates and charges. He also challenged the utility companies to develop long term programs to bury power lines to make the system more resilient to the effects of major coastal storms like Super Storm Sandy.

Economic Development Supervisor Romaine announced that the Town has experienced its greatest economic expansion in the last seven years, due in great part to the many new projects that are now, or soon to be, in the construction stage. Noting that companies view Brookhaven as "a place to relocate, stay and expand" the Supervisor stated that over the past year, Brookhaven's Industrial Development Agency and Local Development Corporation:

- Closed on 11 major economic development projects, adding over 550 permanent and construction jobs
- Helped to retain 1200 jobs in the Town
- Brought in approximately \$257 million in private investment
- Has 14 projects in process with \$344 million of potential investment and over 2000 jobs retained or created

Land Use

Recognizing the current trend from brick and mortar to online retail, the Town is adjusting its zoning to reflect the change. Our zoning codes are currently being adjusted to prevent overdevelopment and reduce traffic in many communities by avoiding strip shopping centers and excessive retail development.

- Land Use Plans and rezonings have been completed along Route 25 from Ridge to Coram and Route 25A from Wading River to Mount Sinai
- Land Use Plans are near completion for Portion Road in Farmingville, Montauk Highway in Eastport, East Moriches, Center Moriches and Moriches
- A Land Use Plan focused on the Route 25A Corridor Study from the Smithtown Town line to the Village of Port Jefferson

The goal of these land use plans is to prevent overdevelopment and promote smart growth principals.

Quality of Life and Housing Code Enforcement

Supervisor Romaine reinforced his commitment to improve the quality of life in every community by strict enforcement of the Town's building, fire and housing codes and ridding neighborhoods of dangerous "zombie houses." In 2016, the Town:

- Demolished 53 abandoned, unsafe structures
- Boarded up over 400 vacant houses
- Cut lawns of 173 properties and provided property maintenance at 255 homes
- Continued the fight against illegal student housing in many communities including Stony Brook

The Supervisor also repeated his call for the State of New York to ease the financial burden of the Stony Brook and Setauket fire districts for their continued responsibility of protecting life and property on the Stony Brook University campus.

Waste Management

The Town's Department of Waste Management has continued to keep Brookhaven Town clean and green while examining several new technologies regarding the handling of garbage including private vendors who have offered to take our waste and convert it into gas and/or oil. As technologies improve, the Town will continue to investigate these new methods for solid waste disposal and reuse. In 2016, the Department of Waste Management:

- Removed 292 tons of roadside litter and 10,686 roadside signs;
- Sponsored 12 paper shredding/e-waste events, collecting 100,000 lbs. of paper and 600,00 lbs. of electronic waste;
- Recycled over 28,000 tons of Town generated single-stream recyclables; • Collected over 30,000 tons of leaf and yard waste;
- Established single-stream recycling collection programs in seven school districts; and
- Entered into single-stream recycling Inter-municipal agreements with three Towns and five villages.

The Supervisor stated, "As the landfill approaches its end of useful life, it is clear that Long Island needs regional solutions to its waste management problem. This can be accomplished through inter-municipal agreements, public-private partnerships, innovative technology such as anaerobic digestion, creation of a regional ashfill for Long Island, and addressing off-Island transportation."

The Environment

As Long Island's leader in protecting the environment, Supervisor Romaine said the Town will strengthen its commitment to protect and preserve "what is left" for future generations by:

- Strengthening planning, zoning and building codes;
- Better protecting coastal marshes, restore wetlands and restrict residential and commercial development in flood zones; and
- Cutting the Town's greenhouse gas emission by 50% by the year 2020 to address the issues of climate change, rising sea level, and carbon pollution.

The Town has also:

- Established a fuel efficiency standard of 33MPG for its vehicles and continues to replace aging cars with hybrid models;
- Deployed seven hybrid Ford Fusions with six additional coming in the near future;
- Planned to install electric vehicle charging stations at Town Hall;
- Reduced its vehicle emissions by more than 15% over 2005 levels;
- Upgraded to energy efficient, cost-saving lighting at many Town facilities with more to come in the future;
- Replaced thousands of inefficient street lights, parks and ballfield lights with energy efficient LED lights, lowering energy costs and reducing our carbon footprint;
- Instituted wind, solar, and geothermal codes;
- Revised our solar code to prevent the clear cutting of trees for so called "solar farms;" and
- Committed to planting 10,000 new trees by 2020. Last year the Town distributed and planted nearly 2,000 trees and this year, we intend to distribute and plant another 2,000 trees.

Stressing the importance of our aquifers and waterways, Supervisor Romaine outlined the Town's efforts to keep them clean by:

- Continuing the Town's mariculture programs to seed our waterways with oysters and hard shell clams;
- Planting eelgrass to strengthen the ecosystem in Bellport Bay and Moriches Bay;
- Enforcing its Nitrogen Protection Zone that applies to new construction within 500 feet of a body of water;
- Encouraging the residential installation of de-nitrification systems and
- Promoting a policy of groundwater recharge for our sewage treatment plants at a level of treatment that actually results in discharge that is cleaner than our existing groundwater in our shallow aquifer.

Public Transportation

Supervisor Romaine stressed the need for a better, more efficient mass transportation system that is based on 21st century technology and coordinated train and bus routes. He also repeated his call to extend the electrified rail lines to better accommodate eastern Long Island riders. He said, "It's time for our State and Federal Governments to invest in our infrastructure to make us more competitive and productive."

Heroin Epidemic

The problem of drug abuse is at epidemic levels on Long Island and Supervisor Romaine said that all levels of government need to broaden our response. He stated that the Town is ready to work with the State and County to take on this growing healthcare crisis. On the enforcement side, the Town Building Inspectors, Law Investigators, Fire Marshals and Department of Public Safety are actively working with the Suffolk County Police Department to shut down some of the drug houses that plague our communities.

State and Global Issues

Supervisor Romaine stated his commitment to work with all levels of government to help create a better future for all people. He mentioned his support for various County, State and Federal government programs that he would like to see continued. These include environmental and infrastructure improvement programs and those that help people in communities of low to moderate income as well as those who are disabled/handicapped.

In closing, Supervisor Romaine praised the Town Officials and employees who continue to work as a team for the betterment of the Town. He said, "The accomplishments we have achieved are a direct result of our coordinated efforts and working together for the same goal, to Move Brookhaven Forward."

To watch Supervisor Romaine's State of the Town address, [click here](#).